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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BOGOTA 005510

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TAGS: [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [CO](#) [FARC](#)

SUBJECT: FARC PROOF OF LIFE: MILITARY ATTACKS YIELD
POLITICAL GAINS

REF: BOGOTA 3233

Classified By: Charge Milton K. Drucker, reasons 1.4 (c) and (d)

Summary

1. (S/NF) Violence orchestrated by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) continues at increased levels in 2005 and aims to chip away at public support for President Uribe's tough stand against the guerrillas. The FARC's activities have not affected the COLMIL's military campaigns against the FARC, but rather form a pre-election tactic to undermine the Uribe Administration's Democratic Security Strategy and military Plan Patriota offensive. The FARC began sporadic low-level attacks in January 2005 (reftel) and have continued them in April and May against military and civilian targets of opportunity. In addition, the FARC have attempted to resuscitate ties to the international community which were left weakened in 2004, in particular with Venezuela and Ecuador. Although the strategy has not yet affected Uribe's public support numbers significantly, continued attacks are likely to raise doubts about Uribe's tactics with the guerrillas. End Summary.

Failures of 2004 Lead to Rebound

2. (S/NF) The FARC Secretariat, the group in charge of the guerrilla's long-term strategy, gave orders to their fronts in early 2004 to avoid engaging the military during the Plan Patriota offensive. Throughout 2004, the FARC reduced its domestic attacks and international outreach while maintaining business at a somewhat reduced tempo both as a result of the Secretariat's orders and COLMIL efforts to push the FARC to

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the defensive. As a result, President Uribe enjoyed strong public approval ratings and the Colombian public began to endorse Uribe's "strong hand, open arms" policy. However, in December 2004 and January 2005, the FARC leadership reconsidered its position over the course of several high-level meetings. Secretariat officials concurred that FARC passivity and military defeats in 2004 had put it on the defensive militarily, allowed interruption of its narcotics business, and led to a loss of influence domestically and internationally. This strategic reassessment and congressional passage of legislation allowing Uribe to seek a second term (currently under review by the Constitutional Court), prompted the Secretariat to issue new orders to escalate military offensive attacks. In particular, the FARC focused on reestablishing itself internationally and domestically with hopes of reclaiming lost influence and, ideally, diminishing support for Uribe.

3. (S/NF) To realize the Secretariat's strategic goals for 2005, FARC fronts have taken action to (1) demonstrate FARC military prowess and undermine Uribe's Democratic Security Strategy; (2) frighten the Colombian electorate through terrorist activities against military outposts and Colombian cities; and (3) redouble international fundraising, image, and influence activities. If the FARC manages to implement this three-prong strategy, it hopes to counter Uribe's successes and press the electorate towards a more conciliatory candidate.

Striking Back at the Military

4. (C) The FARC's first response is against the Colombian Armed Forces. Plan Patriota Phase 2B, initiated in early 2004, is the largest coordinated military campaign in Colombian history. Its main target is to attack FARC strongholds and claim territory that the FARC have controlled for decades. Plan Patriota enjoyed early successes and diminished the FARC's military capacity. In response, the FARC has initiated clashes, ambushes and offensives against select military targets in 2005. On May 3, for example, three officers from Colombia's National Police were killed when they confronted a group of FARC guerrillas from the 50th

Front. The guerrillas were attempting to put up an illegal roadblock on a stretch of the highway linking Ibague and Cajamarca, Tolima Department. A civilian was also killed in the crossfire and three other policemen were injured. The attack was the first of three attacks against military or police in May alone. In the Plan Patriota area, the military has increasingly found booby-trapped FARC camps and more of a willingness to attack targets than in 2004.

Counteroffensive to Frighten Population

15. (S/NF) In addition to an increase in military activity, the FARC is working to hit media-worthy targets to inspire fear in the population. Although the attacks pose little military threat, the political impact and media coverage reinforces the guerrilla's ability to fight back. For example, the FARC attacked a town hall during a city council meeting in Puerto Rico, Caqueta Department on May 24, killing six municipal councilmen and an official, wounding many others. In 2003, Puerto Rico went from being a FARC stronghold to a headquarters for an Army company, and the attack effectively reasserted the FARC's ability to reach residents and attack despite the Colombian government presence. The attackers fled without being arrested.

16. (C) The FARC's attacks also undermine Uribe's highway and infrastructure security strategies. On May 14, the FARC established a roadblock in La Quiebra, Antioquia Department and stopped eight buses and several trucks for eight hours and told them it was an armed strike. Fourth Brigade troops regained control of the road, but local transport companies reported they would not dispatch vehicles to towns in southeastern Antioquia. In addition, the FARC were suspected of bombing nine electrical towers in the Atlantic Coast region over Memorial Day weekend. The bombings caused widespread power outages in the area and took several days to repair. Leading daily El Tiempo noted that there had never been so many towers targeted in such a short span of time, thus raising fears about the government's ability to protect infrastructure.

International Outreach

17. (S) Despite three high-profile international FARC arrests since January 2004, the FARC resumed efforts to strengthen ties to Venezuela and Ecuador. Venezuela's "Bolivarian Circles" and revolutionary rhetoric continue to be targets of opportunity for FARC leadership to exploit to internationalize the conflict. In addition to providing safe-haven (including official Venezuelan identity cards), Venezuela has become a major supplier for FARC camps in southern Colombia, likely with the tacit acceptance of the Venezuelan government.

18. (S/NF) Intelligence sources also indicate that the FARC has plans to sway the upcoming Ecuadorian elections and fund a FARC-friendly candidate. If those attempts prove successful, Ecuador's occasional extraditions (e.g. Simon Trinidad) and attempts to prevent additional FARC migration would be reversed. The FARC also insist that the Ecuadorian government has an ongoing agreement to protect FARC members -- an agreement that the current administration rejects.

Prospects for Success

19. (S) Comment: The FARC strategy for 2005 aims to affect political decisions and public opinion. To that end, the group has been and will probably continue to make an impact. The public is growing concerned by the seemingly random, high profile attacks and the government does not have sufficient resources to be able to defend every potential target against attacks. Uribe's recent dip in opinion polls may be attributed in part to recent FARC attacks. Ongoing attacks could chip away at the public support, currently at 60 percent, for Uribe's policy towards the guerrillas. End comment.
DRUCKER